DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 107 CE 055 305

AUTHOR	Hill, Sara, Ed.; And Others
TITLE	Special Issue on Classroom Instruction . Information Update.
INSTITUTION	Literacy Assistance Center, New York, NY.
SPONS AGENCY	New York City Mayor's Office of Educational Services, NY.; New York State Education Dept., Albany.
PUB DATE	Dec 89
NOTE	17p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
JOURNAL CIT	Information Update; v6 n2 Dec 1989
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; Adults; Dramatics; *Educational Environment; *English (Second Language); Language Arts; Reading Writing Relationship; Second Language Instruction; *Whole Language Approach; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS	*New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

This newsletter issue focuses entirely on classroom instruction in adult basic education (ABE) and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs. The first article, "Whole Language and Adult Literacy Education" (Kazemek), describes 10 principles of holistic language education and how they may be translated into actual classroom practice. The practices include sustained silent reading; sustained silent writing; prepared oral reading as a social activity; language experience texts; reading, rereading, and retelling published texts; strategy instruction; and informal assessment. The second article, "Building a Community of Learners (Schneider), describes how such a community is created at the ABE learning centers at the New York Public Library. "Teachers Talk about Writing" (Slivka) contains a discussion by four ABE teachers from Region 3 of the New York City Board of Education on how they facilitate writing in their classes. "Parallels in Literacy and Second Language Acquisition" (Hill, Rabideau) argues that ABE and ESL teachers can learn from one another and provides examples. "Teaching Writing through the Arts" (Denis) explains how a drama and playwriting teacher from New York City Public Schools uses theatre games and writing exercises that build writing confidence and interest, including talk sessions, oral storytelling, monologues, two-character plays, free associative plays, team writing, and a sound effects writing exercise. (CML)

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Information Update

Literacy Assistance Center, Inc.

DECEMBER 1989

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

ED321107

FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of *Information Update* focuses entirely on classroom instruction. In an effort to balance our offerings, we solicited articles related to both basic education and English language instruction (we published an article in the June 1989 *Update* on native language literacy) and have attempted to integrate some theoretical perspectives with well-grounded classroom practice.

The lead article for this issue is written by Francis Kazemek, a professor of Education at Eastern Washington University in the state of Washington. We asked Professor Kazemek to provide us with an overview of his understanding of the "whole language" way of teaching reading. We thought it would be helpful to the field to have access to a clear and thorough description of the "principles" of whole language teaching, as well as to get some feel for how those "principles" might be translated into practice.

Our intention in publishing Kazemek's article is not to stoke the fires of the "great debate" between the adherents of a phonics-based approach and those who support a meaning-based one, but rather to clarify, for those who are interested, what makes up a whole language perspective.

Some critics of the whole language philosophy tend to liken it to a "look and say" or "whole word" method, or mistake a particular activity used by whole language teachers, such as Language Experience, to be the embodiment of the whole language way of thinking and doing in the classroom. We hope that Kazemek's article will dispel some of the misconceptions held by practitioners and others, and will lead to a more accurate understanding of whole language teaching.

In describing the whole language philosophy, Kazemek's article talks about the social nature of language and learning. Indeed, the environment or community in which people learn is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. In her article, Melody Schneider, a site advisor at the New York Public Library's Centers for Reading and Writing, explains how building a community of learners works, and how it contributes to teaching and learning.

When many of us were in grade school, the teaching of writing was viewed as an activity separate from other vehicles of expression and communication. It was taught as a separate skill unrelated to the teaching of reading. There was an emphasis on learning the mechanics of the language - identifying parts of speech, diagramming sentences, providing the appropriate punctuation - and not much attention was placed on the thoughts and ideas we wished to express. Through the work of Peter Elbow, Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins and others, the focus is now on the process of writing and what the author wants to say. Helen Slivka, an instructional facilitator at the Board of Education's adult literacy program, captures the richness of the writing process in an engaging "conversation" with several BE and ESOL teachers in her Region. The article is both reflective and practical, and yields much which will be helpful to teachers in the classroom.

The needs of ESOL and BE students are understandably quite different. These learners are placed in separate classes to address their different needs. But are the philosophy and teaching strategies of BE and ESOL teachers so terribly different? Dan Rabideau and Sara Hill of the

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Literacy Assistance Center see some important parallels between literacy and second language acquisition, and feel that the divisions between the two disciplines may not be as great as one might think.

Our last article is written by Nelson Denis, a teacher working with young adults at Grosvenor Neighborhood House. Denis uses the genres of drama and playwriting in exciting and creative ways to encourage reluctant young writers.

This issue of *Information Update* was developed by a newsletter committee, Sara Hill, Joan Pleune and Dan Rabideau of the Literacy Assistance Center. I would like to thank them for their help.

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Black History Month

February is Black History Month. PBS VIDEO has compiled a list of specially selected program titles that relate to Black History. Some of the titles available are listed below. For prices and additional information, contact PBS VIDEO at 1-800-222-5796 or write to them at 1807 West Sunnyside, Chicago, Illinois 60640.

The American Adventure...
- Agitation and Compromise
- Crisis of Union
- A Frightful Conflict
-

The American Experience...
- Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice
- That Rhythm, Those Blues
- Underground Railroad

Black Magic
A Day to Remember: August 28, 1963

At the Literacy Assistance Center.....

At the Literacy Assistance Center, we have a limited number of copies of the Chelsea House biography series, Black Americans of Achievement, including Marcus Garvey, Langston Hughes, Sojourner Truth, and Nat Turner. In addition, we have various titles from the African-American Images Series and some source books.

We also have some videos available for short-term loan:

- Eyes on the Prize series
- Story of English/Black English
- Roots
- Native Son
- Malcolm X
- The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman

Whole Language and Adult Literacy Education

by Francis E. Kazemek

It seems that wherever we look in the professional literature these days we see articles and references to "whole language." Many K-12 teachers are practicing, or trying to practice, whole language strategies in their classrooms. Publishers are developing and promoting a wide-range of whole language (or, at least, supposed whole language) reading/language arts materials. And now whole language is finding its way into the adult literacy program. What exactly is "whole language," and what does it mean for adult literacy education? My purpose in this short article is to present some underlying principles which support whole language teaching and learning and to explore briefly the practical implications of these principles for the adult classroom.

Contrary to a common misunderstanding, whole language is not an "approach" or a "method." It is not a set of practices which all instructors and students dutifully follow. There are no whole language instructors' guides with lists of skills and specific sequences to be followed.

Rather, whole language is a way of looking at how people, both children and adults, learn and use oral and written language. It is a particular perspective about language teaching and learning; it is a theoretical orientation, a "philosophy," if you will. Let's look at the principles which underpin this philosophy.

General Principles of Holistic Language Education

First Principle: *All language, oral and written, reflects cognitive, emotional, social, and personal differences.* Our language is what makes us who and what we are. Since we are all uniquely individual with an almost infinite number of different life experiences, our oral and written language will oftentimes reflect those differences.

Second Principle: *All language, oral and written, is social as well as personal.* Although we are all unique individuals, we are also social beings. We develop our language in a myriad number of different social contexts. We learn to speak and listen as we interact with other people, and we, likewise, learn to write and read as we connect with other writers and readers.

Third Principle: *Written language has its roots in oral language.* Vygotsky, a noted Russian psychologist, points out that oral language is "natural" in the sense that it is spontaneous, involuntary, and nonconscious. No one "teaches" us how to speak and listen; we just do. Written language, on the other hand, is abstract, voluntary, and conscious. We become literate by building on and connecting to our developed oral language.

These three principles lead to related principles of teaching and learning.

Fourth Principle: *Instruction must build on and connect to an individual's life and language experiences.* Unless students can make the bridge between their own language and experiences and those in the texts they are attempting to read and write, they will encounter difficulty and frustration.

Fifth Principle: *The four language modes, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, are mutually supportive and must not be artificially separated.* The four language modes must be *integrated* during instruction: oral language supports reading and writing; reading exposes us to a wide variety of styles, formats, and conventions; writing helps us experience how authors put texts together.

Sixth Principle: *Oral and written language experiences must be purposeful, functional, and real.* Reading and writing activities in the adult literacy classroom must be for real purposes (e.g. to entertain, to convince, to explore, to express oneself, and so on). "Dummy runs" and "practice exercises" (for example, various workbook activities) which are not authentic uses of language must be avoided. Thus, complete and whole texts must be used for reading (for example, whole stories, complete newspaper articles, recipes, and so on)

Francis Kazemek is a professor of Education at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington.

and for writing (for example, whole letters to real people, stories, reminiscences, directions, and so forth).

Seventh Principle: *Reading and writing, like listening and speaking, proceed from the whole to the part.* Thus, for example, comprehension of written texts *leads* to an awareness and knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences ("phonics"). We can only make meaningful generalizations about these correspondences *after* we understand what we've read, and not the other way around. Likewise, the actual writing of meaningful texts *leads* to a knowledge of grammar, spelling generalizations, and so on.

Eighth Principle: *There is no set hierarchy of skills or experiences which all adults must master in sequence.* Reading and writing are complex and in many respects "all-at-once" kinds of processes; they cannot be broken down into tiny, isolated skills which are then taught in a hierarchical and linear manner.

Ninth Principle: *Readers and writers, even those who are very proficient, often cannot articulate or demonstrate specific skills or competencies.* Our language competence is almost never captured by our language performance; we always know more than we are able to display at any given time. Similarly, we can be quite competent readers and writers and still be unable to talk *about* reading and writing. (For example, I would ask the reader to give me an example of a "digraph"? Can't do it? Well, the "ea" in "bread" and the "ch" in "chin" are digraphs. You may not know what a digraph is, but you can still read. Likewise, I might ask you to define "gerund" for me. Can't? Well, you use gerunds in your speaking and writing all the time, but you probably don't know that it is an "English verbal noun ending in --ing that has the function of a substantive" [e.g. 'working'].)

Tenth Principle: *Assessment and evaluation of whole language education must itself be holistic.* We cannot adhere to the above nine principles and then attempt to assess an adult's growth by using some standardized or criterion-referenced test which measures isolated, partial, or purposeless language skills. (Think of yourself as a proficient language user and the"gerund" example described in the ninth principle !) To do so would be like evaluating the quality of an apple by using the standards typically applied to oranges.

Whole Language Principles = Whole Language Classroom

Let's look at how these principles might guide what we do in the adult literacy classroom. The activities I describe below are **not** some prescribed list to be followed. Rather, they are simply illustrative of how whole language principles might be used to develop meaningful teaching and learning scenarios. There are many different strategies and sequences that might be followed in a whole language classroom. Again, *it is the theoretical orientation or perspective which is primary; the specific activities grow out of that.*

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Writing (SSW)

Adults who are becoming more proficient with reading and writing need to engage in meaningful practice on a regular, hopefully daily, basis. The silent reading and rereading of self-selected materials should begin and/or end each class session; at the beginning, these silent reading sessions might last only 5 minutes or so. The text should be something in which the adult is interested; for example, it might be a Language Experience (LEA) text which the adult or the class dictated and the instructor scribed, a book, poem, magazine, newspaper, and so on. (The instructor might supply or help the student find appropriate text.) The adult doesn't have to be able to read all the words. Similarly, a few minutes devoted to sustained writing in a personal journal about something that happened that day, one's feelings, a topic previously discussed in class, and so on will help adults experience how they can use writing to organize and express their ideas and emotions. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are not important in such writing. (Principles 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)

Prepared Oral Reading as a Social Activity

Oral reading allows adults to experience the rhythms, perhaps rhyme, and "feel" of written language. All oral reading should be a practiced *performance* after a good deal of silent reading and oral rehearsal. Rehearsed oral readings done with a partner or small group provide the individual with support and peer models; this is especially important for the adult who is learning English as a second language. There are many variations of prepared oral readings, for example, choral reading, jazz chants, raps, poems with alternating voices,

readers theatre, and so forth. Such reading develops camaraderie, confidence, and an "ear" for spoken texts. Again, the kinds of texts used are many: LEA texts, poems, popular songs, folktales, lists from newspapers, directions, recipes, and so forth. (Principles 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)

Language Experience Texts (LEA)

Group-composed and dictated texts which are scribed by the instructor are invaluable for developing meaningful reading materials, discussion about aspects of reading and writing, explorations of society and the world, and group solidarity. The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire says that learning to read is really learning to read the world. Group LEA activities allow adults to explore issues, feelings, "dangerous" ideas, and experiences among themselves and then to translate their oral language into a written text. The form that the written text takes is various: oral history, narrative, poem, song, letter to an editor or policymaker, directions on how to do or make something, and so forth. The instructor is not only able to serve as a model by reading and rereading the text, but is also able to point out the differences between oral and written language. Moreover, through the LEA process the instructor is able to gather informal information about how individuals are developing as readers and writers. (Principles: all)

Reading, Rereading, and Retelling Published Texts

LEA is incomplete unless the students make connections between their own texts and other, published texts. Thus, students' own writing, dictated or otherwise, needs to be complemented with a wide and rich assortment of other materials. For example, a LEA text dealing with experiences during the Vietnam (or Korean or Second World) War needs to be connected with a book (or selection thereof), article, and so on about the war. A group poem about faded friendships needs to be compared to one or more other poems about the loss of friends. These connections foster a great deal of reading and rereading (orally and silently, individually and with a partner or group) and, importantly, retelling. Research has shown that the more we retell what we have read the better we understand it. Retellings can be as simple as telling someone else what you have read or jotting down what the text means to you (what you "got" out of it) in your journal. Retelling contributes to social interaction and also allows the instructor, and student, to assess how well the student is constructing meaning from a particular text. (Principles: all)

Strategy Instruction

Based upon the students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening described above, the instructor can develop appropriate strategy lessons; these lessons deal with specific aspects of the reading and writing processes that the adults need to further develop. For example, the instructor might model how conscious use of background knowledge, context, and understanding of sound-symbol correspondence, used together, can help a reader make a pretty good guess at an unknown word. Or the instructor might demonstrate how reading in "chunks" instead of word-by-word tends to improve comprehension. Or, with regard to writing, s/he might explore with the students how some kind of visual sketch, map, or organizer can help us gather and arrange our ideas before we begin to write. The important things about strategy lessons are that they *follow from and build upon* what adults are actually doing with language and that they are only introduced when needed. (Principles 4, 7, 8, 9, 10)

Informal Assessment

Holistic teaching and learning requires holistic means of assessing students' developing proficiency with written language. Such assessment, by its very nature, is informal and on-going; moreover, it is something that *both* instructor and student do. Ongoing and informal assessment allows the instructor and student to document growth and to plan for future instruction. Informal assessment strategies are various: keeping anecdotal records of what a student does in particular reading and writing situations; listening to how a student reads different kinds of texts; having an adult listen to her/himself read on tape; conferencing and talking with an adult about her reading and writing, that is, difficulties, efficient strategies, personal goals, types of texts s/he needs or wants to read and write, and so on; preparing a checklist of specific things that you and the adult want to accomplish during a specific time period; collecting samples of the adult's reading (perhaps on tape, using some type of miscue analysis) and writing and charting growth over time. All assessment, as Kenneth Goodman observes, should let the instructor and student know *what* they are doing and *why* they are doing it. (Principle 10)

(Continued on page 7)

Building a Community of Learners

by Melody Schneider

Students and tutors in our adult learning centers at The New York Public Library frequently talk about the wonderful community atmosphere. The strong sense of community, they say, makes it a great place to learn. Hearing that so often, staff began talking about this issue. From our discussions a couple of questions were formed: "How did this sense of community develop?" and "What does community have to do with reading and writing instruction?"

We started to find answers by talking with our students and tutors. We asked them to describe what happened at the Centers that made them a community. We conducted a survey with our tutors to learn more about their feelings and needs. And, while sharing the survey results at some ABE conferences, we asked our audiences of students and educators what community meant to them. From all the responses we gathered, some consistent themes emerged:

A community is a place where people come together for common reasons, a place where you feel safe and can take risks. Power should be shared and knowledge valued. Dialogue, respect and high levels of comfort and security are vital.

With this in mind we looked at our next question: "What does community have to do with reading and writing instruction?" We know that reading and writing are not passive activities. They involve dialogue and experimenting with language. As instructors we also know that readers and writers need to share in the decisions about what they read and write, and that their knowledge is important since it helps create the meaning of the text. So a learning center where power is shared and knowledge valued, where it's safe to take risks and experiment with language, and where dialogue is encouraged, must eventually enrich reading and writing instruction.

But how is community created?

Our basic program philosophy is student-centered and that is reflected in all areas of instruction. From the time new students walk in the door they are involved in the decision making. To get them started, we designed an intake process that involves more than a placement test. New students are given an opportunity to reflect on their goals, share their learning experiences and begin to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. We ask them to think about their role as "student" and what they want to learn. New students begin to see that dialogue is encouraged, and their needs are important.

Often new students will join new tutors in a practicum - our tutor training. The practicum is designed to model how tutors and students can work as collaborators. Together they read, write, and share philosophies and strategies. They discuss their respective roles. Everyone gets the same information and some of the mystique of "instruction" is uncovered. Participants finish the practicum knowing that they aren't alone. When they join their tutorial group there will be familiar faces around.

Student orientations also serve as an introduction to the center. Small groups of new students meet to share their goals, and talk about reading and writing. Students currently in the program are involved in many ways. They may plan the orientation, or spend a part of the time sharing their experiences and answering questions. Orientations introduce new students to the community, and current students are able to share their expertise.

Tutorial groups can be made up of one tutor and 3-5 students, or 2-3 tutors and many students. They can be formed based on similar reading and writing levels or on common interests. These groups make up the larger Center community. Instruction begins with group members collaborating to identify both group and individual goals. Together they negotiate how lesson time will be spent. There are reading materials displayed everywhere - readily available for browsing or borrowing - and students choose

Melody Schneider is a literacy site coordinator at the New York Public Library's Centers for Reading and Writing.

their own books. The groups may spend time talking about how to select books and they learn how their knowledge of a topic can help them read. Students also choose writing topics, and are encouraged to experiment with language rather than to concentrate on spelling. They share and give feedback and learn that they have things to offer each other. The instruction encourages dialogue and risk taking.

Building the community should not only involve students, but tutors as well. Our tutors act as models and facilitators, and participate in learning. They read and write along with their students and share strategies. They are encouraged to grow along with the students. They keep dialogue journals with staff in which they can reflect on the lessons, ask for assistance or give their suggestions. Staff designs inservices based on tutors' interests and needs in the same way tutors design lessons based on the students' goals. The most important thing we learned from our tutors was that being *asked* to share their feelings and observations made them feel more involved and more vested in the community.

Students and tutors will point to two events that epitomize our community: our whole-program reading and writing workshops, and Learning Celebrations which coincide with publication of the latest student journals.

For whole-program workshops, the individual tutorial groups join together and pool their knowledge. In the writing workshops we focus on one aspect of writing. It might be sharing strategies for topic selection or we may read our writing and discuss sharing and giving feedback. But we all work together and everyone's knowledge is valued. We reaffirm our common goals as readers and writers and extend the dialogue beyond the small groups.

Learning celebrations are the high points of the year. We take incredible pride in our work and this is the time when we recognize our endeavors. Everyone is involved in planning the evening. We celebrate both individual achievements and our accomplishments as a community. A wide variety of writing is collected and published in the Center's "Journal," and the authors are anxious to see the finished product. Families and friends join us. New writers read their stories, while other members might talk about the Center or their growth. The evening is topped off by a feast that we all share in preparing.

Celebrations, workshops, orientations, goal setting...it isn't any one of these that creates a community. The feelings of community students and tutors talk about come from them. The instructional approach forms a model of people working together. From that model people begin to share knowledge, feel comfortable, make decisions and take risks on many levels. They form community.

Kazemek (continued from page 5)

Conclusion

The principles of holistic language education underpin a variety of classroom strategies and activities. In this very brief overview I presented ten principles and then described how these principles might be translated into actual classroom practice. Those who would like more detailed information might want to do some additional reading. A good place to start would be with:

Kazemek, F.E. & Rigg, P. (1986). "Four poets: Modern poetry in the adult literacy classroom." *Journal of Reading*, 30, pp. 218-225.

Rigg P., & Kazemek, F.E. (1985). "For adults only: Reading materials for adult literacy students." *Journal of Reading*, 28, pp. 726-731.

Rigg P., & Taylor L. (1979). "A 21-year-old learns to read." *English Journal*, 68, pp. 52-56.

"Whole language" is not only important for K-12 classrooms; it is necessary for a vital and meaningful adult literacy classroom in which students and instructor learn and grow together in a collaborative manner.

Teachers Talk About Writing

by Helen Slivka

Recently four teachers met with me to talk about how they facilitate writing in their classes. They are Harriet Bailer, who teaches BE, Jane Ellis, Wendy Lancourt and Joan Siff, who are ESL teachers. Among the four, there is an extensive range of experience with students at all levels in both disciplines. I am Helen Slivka, an instructional facilitator. We all work in Region 3, N.Y.C. Board of Education ABE/ESL/HSE Services.

Helen: Let's begin by talking about why writing is such an important part of what you do with your classes.

Harriet: I didn't plan to do a lot of writing, but I found that BE4 students like to write, that they do well and that it shows them they can do more than they thought. It gives them a feeling of power, I would say, when they see their words; when they read their words to each other and when they respond to each other's writing. So it almost was for me that writing begets writing.

Wendy: Writing is that perfect blend of a physical act with a cognitive process. ESL students are forced, in a sense, to have a conversation in English with themselves to arrive at some production on a page. The struggle they go through, which is a very internal struggle, helps them to focus on the language. It is a very creative outlet and the power of the creation is within the student. Harriet mentioned "power." I'm very committed to having students feel that sense of power. Writing is something they own. It comes from them: it cannot be taken away.

Jane: I also see writing as part and parcel of the whole process of learning a language. There was no conscious decision to teach writing or not to teach writing. I never considered it to be an isolated activity. It was more that for adult ESL students, even for beginning students that I teach, writing was as much a part of what they would be doing as speaking and listening.

Helen: How do you begin to get students writing? What has worked for you? What hasn't?

Joan: First, I want to agree with Wendy and Jane that writing is really necessary to help adult ESL students improve their English. I've been teaching the advanced level in the daytime and I've always used writing activities because the students could speak more and read more and therefore could write more.

Some of them really enjoyed writing about personal experiences and memories. However, there were always students in every class who didn't like to write. We always published a magazine of student writing at the end of the year and some students didn't contribute to it. When Betty Gottfried and Coni Buro did their series of workshops in our region on the writing process, I found many ideas that could encourage students to write. Now students keep journals in which they write every day. In class, the only prerequisite is that they write in English; although I do say that if they want to write everyday at home in their native language, that is good too. I simply want them to develop facility in writing. And it works. Everyone writes now.

Another activity that works well is an exercise that I learned from Gay Brookes in a writing course at Columbia. Students are asked to write "something" using five words that are written on the blackboard. The first words were: weekend, bright, dessert, flowers, whole. After writing for about fifteen minutes they met in groups of four (4) and listened to each piece of writing and told what they remembered, what they liked, what was confusing and what they'd like to hear more about. The general feedback was that they enjoyed the activity - most of all the different ways in which people used the same words. Some wrote sentences, some paragraphs, one wrote definitions, a couple wrote stories.

Harriet: I feel very strongly about the teacher writing with students. It creates a feeling of of

Helen Slivka is an instructional facilitator at Region 3 in the Board of Education's ABE/ESL/HSE Services Program in New York City.

cooperation - of everyone working together. It gives them a quiet time in which they can get their thoughts out.

We do our thinking as a class. We brainstorm for ideas and everybody has something in mind before they start writing. What I also have done, linking literature and writing, is read an excerpt with a theme in mind. For example, I recently read something from Auden about encountering a snake. The discussion was about experiences in life that were unexpected. What exciting and sometimes unfortunate experiences they had had! And, of course they were able to write about them.

Helen: What about your literacy class?

Harriet: In the literacy class, which meets six hours a week, it's a struggle because it takes a great deal of time to get a student to write a sentence. For myself, that was not what I wanted to do with writing. The best thing that I found was to have them talk into a tape recorder. I would transcribe it and they would read it back. It seemed to me to give more importance to their skills. Here they had paragraphs to read and more substance.

Jane: What I try to do in planning is always to make sure that everything is related to a writing activity. From the very beginning I use pictures from magazines. Students have a chance to look at a picture in their group, work through it and pool what they know. The secretary writes words, phrases, maybe some simple sentences that come from the group. This is shared with the whole class and all the pictures and stories are posted in the room for students to refer to and look at; so the class is expanding vocabulary and structure.

Even beginning introductions are turned into interview situations that students write up.

Wendy: When I first began to teach I saw writing as anything that was written down. I still believe there's some validity to that. Whatever you write is writing because the same kinds of thought processes are necessary for anything beyond simple copying. But the manipulation of language, the capturing of language is a wonderful thing to behold - that someone finally gets the tiger by the tail and is able to have her work reflect her true thoughts.

I'm working with level 2 - high beginners - now. We do language experience activities very often. We come together and think about a shared experience. For example, we talked about Halloween just passed. The reality of Halloween in the city has become something dark - an excuse for violence that disturbs the students. We projected Halloween into the 21st century. Students produced a lot of sentences that seemed to come from personal experiences and from their underlying fears over what goes on in their neighborhood. The sentences were written on strips and then in groups students arranged the sentences and found their own order. I always supply blank strips so groups can fill in what is missing or add something they feel is important. A representative reads their final version and one is selected by the class for publication in the regional newsletter.

Pictures are important, too. I use art postcards from museums and evocative pictures to stimulate writing. A group will have 3 or 4 pictures that must be related through a story. I used one picture of some South African miners that was stark but very effective. One of them had a little whistle around his neck and that led to a lot of discussion projecting why he might be wearing a whistle and further what life in South Africa is like for a young black man.

Helen: I noticed that picture and the students' writing on the bulletin board. You all use newspapers and "real" reading material with your classes.

Jane: I will bring in a newspaper picture and put it on the board with simple questions. Students help each other to answer the questions. After the recent hurricane, I asked them to bring in pictures from any newspaper - English or Spanish. We put all the pictures on the board and they were able to talk about the hurricane from the pictures. A secretary recorded their sentences and that was their story. I did the same thing with the earthquake and they just took off.

Joan: We read newspaper articles and use them to write opinion pieces. I also use literature, poetry, and short stories to stimulate writing. Sometimes students write their own poems. They're wonderful.

We just read one of a new series of stories from New Readers Press called "The Race." It was timely because it was just before the New York City marathon and the main character is a young man who loves to run. He can't find work that he wants to do because he doesn't speak English. Two wonderful things happened. The students were able to read the whole book quickly and understand it easily. The next day they wrote

about his experiences and feelings.

My students also enjoy learning songs. The lyrics are poetic and they have suggested songs like "Sound of Silence" and "El Condor Pasa" for us to study and learn in class.

Helen: Harriet, your students have produced a lot of poetry. How does it happen?

Harriet: We start by reading poetry. Many of the poems are by famous poets but some are by former students. Each person picks a poem to read aloud. They look at it and listen to it. I never taught technique, but I found that many students who had never written a poem before, once they started and had something to say, were able to compress it in a small amount of space.

The summer of '88 we read a whole novel as a class project - *Sula*. It was a big project even though it wasn't a big book because it meant that people had to be there often enough to keep up with each chapter. It was a commitment and it worked. We read, we discussed and then we wrote letters to Toni Morrison. The students loved *Sula*; they understood it and they learned a novel doesn't have to be intimidating. The bonus was that Toni Morrison answered a couple of letters. We're reading *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck in my afternoon class. That book evokes such responses. Students are able to discuss it and write about their feelings.

I encourage students to write responses to each others' work. Written responses give permanence to their reactions. I remember how important those little bits of paper were for me when I was in the Lehman Writing Project.

Wendy: I also encourage students to inform each other of things via written messages. This can be in the form of a memo - short, telegraphic messages - but it is a written communication. It must be read, understood and responded to. An activity that has been very successful involves using calculator or cash register tape. I started to pass around a roll for students to write comments on about an activity. At first, they were very general in the "It was nice" or "It was interesting" category but then students began to comment and respond to what others had written on the roll and we began to get reported speech, "He said..." etc. We were doing work on Columbus Day - using the IRCA (Immigration Reform & Control Act) material. We started to talk about what kind of guy Columbus was. I was trying from the little bit of text we had read to project character. I passed around a roll of tape and students wrote. It was a fun activity and non-threatening because the tape is narrow and there's a sense one is not writing a lot. Students read what is on the tape, add their contributions and pass it on. It's a kind of focused class journal.

Helen: Have you been successful with individual journals?

Wendy: Individual journals at the beginning ESL level are difficult. A piece of blank paper seems to defeat students.

Jane: I haven't been successful with individual journals, either. Maybe I haven't persisted enough.

Helen: Both of you are very successful at getting your students to write individual pieces. They are not just producing group writing.

Jane: When we have a theme such as Women's History Month, they talk about women who have had an impact on their lives. It begins with family members, but it grows to include other women they know or women they know about whose lives have touched them in some personal way. I ask them to select one woman, find out what they can about her and then in class they write.

Individual writing also comes out of talking about their own lives and common experiences - why they came to the U.S.; how they felt; who helped them; what obstacles they encountered.....

Wendy: ....a loved one, a good experience, a bad one.

Helen: How do you deal with errors in students' writing?

Joan: Students work in small groups and respond to each other's writing, asking for clarification, even pointing out grammatical errors. Some students only want me to correct. I meet with a student and point out or underline an error. The student then has to make the correction. It takes a great deal of time and patience. Students write everyday for at least half an hour - proofreading, revising, rewriting.

Harriet: Many errors are due to carelessness I've found. So I encourage students to reread and look for errors. In the advanced class I deal with common errors in their expository writing as teaching guides. Generally, I respond to the content of student writing.

Jane: There are a lot of errors in ESL 1. With group writing, I circulate and say "I see a spelling

error" or "a grammar error." It takes time but they can usually find it. We use Longman dictionaries and they help.

With individual writing, sometimes I pair students to help each other with corrections, but usually I conference with a student. It can be an informal conference. As I'm walking around and reading, I will point and say, "Is this correct?" or "Something is missing." With some students I need to find out what it is they want to say, and help them find the language.

Wendy: I focus on those errors which detract from comprehension. I permit invented spelling but slowly as we move along, some examples of errors will be set up on the board, i.e. change y to i before es.

Student/teacher conferences can be done in different ways. Simply saying "That's an interesting beginning"; "Can you think of something else you want to say," is a conference. It may be for sentences which are unintelligible and where the student struggles to get the message through. Sometimes it's a very different message from what I imagined.

We do a lot of peer editing, too. I call it "Three Editors in Search of an Author." In groups of four, three students function as editors; one is the author. Of course, the roles rotate. Everyone has a copy of the writing which the author reads. The mandate is to work on mechanics, of course, but also to work on organization, additions, deletions. The author always has final say.

This takes a lot of time but students see the need in writing for accuracy, for correctness. I think it may be the only way to help reduce fossilized errors. They see the need to change.

Helen: Finally, can you assess how writing impacts on student progress in other areas?

Joan: I had a student who had hearing and pronunciation problems. Writing became a primary source of communication for her. She kept a journal all the time. She even wrote at her part-time factory job when there were lulls. People thought she was an investigator because they saw her writing so much.

Two other women had to take entrance exams for college. These are difficult but they reported that they felt they had done fairly well because of the amount of writing we had done in class.

I've found that students' oral fluency is improved and their language is richer. When they find a particular expression or phrase which really expresses what they want to say in writing, it becomes internalized and they use it in speaking also. There's a connection for sure between reading and writing. What they have read carries over into what they write and vice-versa. Writing is essential.

Harriet: I can't really measure the transfer from writing to reading but I am certain that when a student writes something that is well received it gives her a wonderful feeling of confidence. I've seen that glow and it lasts.

When we publish students' writing in the newsletter or in class booklets, they love it and so do I. I only wish we could do a more professional job of publishing.

Jane: I think the writing enriches their language and provides another medium in which to express themselves and because they're always sharing they learn a lot from each other. We read other students' writing and they are excited when their writing is published. One quick story. We take a lot of trips. Recently we went to the U.N. and one student copied a quotation of Perez de Quellar and wrote about it. She said it was a proverb to her.

Wendy: I agree that writing impacts on their speaking and their listening as well. The dynamics of peer editing provide them with very real opportunities for functional speech - asking questions, negotiating for meaning, clarifying. They are holding real conversations related to their own work - a piece of writing in English.

It takes time. There's no "Eureka," but little pathways are slowly made in every direction.

Helen: Thank you all for this thoughtful, rich conversation.

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Parallels in Literacy and Second Language Acquisition

Sara Hill & Dan Rabideau

Many Basic Education and English-as-a-Second Language teachers talk about a gap in knowledge about each other's field. This comes in part from an artificial separation between the two groups of teachers, created when programs are funded to provide either ESL or BE services. However, the boundaries between ESL and BE are fast becoming blurred. Many non-native speakers of English are in BE programs and conversely, many ESL students have literacy needs in their first language. What's problematic in this division is that teachers in one field can learn a great deal from teachers in the other, and while there are differences in students' needs, many instructional strategies are applicable in both fields.

There are primarily two trends in Second language teaching and in literacy instruction. The methodological differences can (however simplistically) be drawn between a *Grammatical Syllabus* and *Communicative Approaches* in ESOL and between *Discrete Skills* and *Whole Language* approaches in literacy. This article will examine Communicative ESL theory and Whole Language theory, because they share many underlying assumptions. Primarily, they see speaking, reading, and writing as communicative acts rather than sets of discrete skills.

Communicative ESL theory explores how people *acquire* a second language, in ways similar to what we know, so far, about first language acquisition. This is different from *learning* language, which implies learning the rules of the language. Similarly, Whole Language theory (drawing on what we know, so far, about literacy acquisition and cognition) implies a more 'interactive' model for literacy instruction, e.g., learners don't wait to learn a group of sounds to begin reading and writing; rather, they learn the sounds while engaged in reading and writing for communicative purposes.

Krashen (1985) suggests that given enough "comprehensible input," adults can learn a second language. The key word is "comprehensible." To just listen to native speakers is not helpful, because all that **in**comprehensible input becomes just so much noise. Try watching a television program in a language you are totally unfamiliar with. We may try to understand the plot as we would while watching a silent movie, but we seem to "turn off" the auditory part of it. A person with no knowledge of Japanese could watch the Japanese Broadcasting Station for many days, and probably not learn more than a word or two. On the other hand, someone with a basic knowledge of Japanese, might expand that knowledge by viewing Japanese-language programs.

An analogy to "comprehensible input" in literacy seems to be that of "schema theory". According to Anderson and Pearson (1984) schema are "... abstract knowledge structure(s)" which all people have and which develop to process the great amount of information encountered in everyday life. How elaborate schema become depends, overridingly, on life experiences. This theory is significant when teaching reading to students who have limited or different background schema. For example, having a collection of print material whose content is unfamiliar to students will probably not help students to improve their reading. One way of drawing from or building upon students' knowledge base is to use student-dictated texts (the Language Experience Approach) as the basis for reading. These texts are based on the language that students use in discussing topics that are important to them. Because the dictated stories come from students' actual conversations, they provide a context for understanding and are easier to read.

Commercially-prepared texts can be used as well. It is important, however, to provide or demonstrate strategies to help students select books. Students also need to do pre-reading activities such as a discussion of what they may know about a text before they begin, and make predictions that can either be confirmed or disconfirmed as they go along.

Students need to know that there are books that they can read and that, like advanced readers, they need to find books that are meaningful to them. As an example, Jane (not her real name)

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was a beginning reader, but she was trying to read paperbacks that were much too difficult. She never got very far in any of them. She might spend a week on a title and get to page 3. Her teacher began to show her some of the high interest/low readability books (books written for an adult audience, but at an easier reading level). Now she found that she could read most of the words, and she could "figure out" the rest, especially when she had selected a book that was interesting to her. In fact, she began to read a lot more than she ever had before.

Probably the most significant element common to both Communicative ESL theory and Whole Language theory is that they both strive for "student-centeredness." Krashen (1985) describes the ***Affective Filter Hypothesis*** as a "mental block that prevents acquirers from fully utilizing the comprehensible input that they receive for language acquisition." Krashen also states (1983) that "***attitudinal*** variables relating to success in second language acquisition generally relate directly to language acquisition but not necessarily to language learning." (p. 37) In other words, the filter affects how well we communicate in the language, not how much we can say about the grammar. This filter has to do with whether we see ourselves as users of the new language, how much we reconcile ourselves to letting go, to a certain extent, of our native language, and whether we see ourselves as people who actually communicate in the new language.

It's possible that the "affective filter" described by Krashen also takes its toll on literacy learners. Particularly for learners who have had negative experiences in school, the stress related to reading and writing may create an affective filter of its own. Both Smith (1983) and Kline (1988) suggest that one role of the teacher is to believe that students can learn and to help students to believe it themselves. As with language learners, reading/writing students need to see themselves in the role of readers and writers. This is done primarily in the course of a great deal of reading and writing for a variety of purposes. Students also need to share their experiences and strategies with other readers and writers in the classroom. When teachers develop curriculum with the understanding that both ESL and BE students are not walking into the classroom as blank slates, that they have had experiences as voyagers, workers, parents and partners, then they can help students to lower the affective filter.

Another way to lower the affective filter for both BE and ESL learners is to provide them with successful experiences, so that they're not "on the spot." We need to provide learners with a non judgmental, supportive environment. In BE, w can do this by responding initially to the content o what students write instead of the surface feature (the author rather than the writing). In ESL teaching approaches like Total Physical Respons allow students to learn by listening rather tha having to produce correct language before they ar able. By not focusing on "correctness" and givin learners room to develop, we may be able to lowe the affective filter.

All teachers have views on how students learn If the view of learning is that students learn b imitating a 'perfect' model, the focus will be more on correcting errors than anything else. If, on the other hand, the view is more developmental, where students are reconstructing a rule system (e.g., syntactic or orthographic) the focus will be less on correction and more on experimentation. In the latter example, an ESL teacher would not expect students to begin by producing fully developed and connected discourse. The teacher would provide a scaffold or structure so that students could star with the language that they have. The teache would be able to expand on the students' knowledge. The following example of ***teacher-talk*** (Krashen and Terrell, 1983,) describes the early production of language for ESL students. The teacher is giving the students (student responses in parentheses) opportunities to use their own production skills when they are ready to volunteer a response. The role of the teacher is not to correct the language, but to respond to the content of the language.

> *Is there a woman in the picture? (Yes). Is there a man in the picture (No). Is the woman old or young? (Young) Yes, she's young, but very ugly. (Class responds no, pretty). That's right, she's not ugly, she's pretty. What is she wearing? (Dress). Yes, she's wearing a dress. What color is the dress? (Blue). Right, she's wearing a blue dress. And what do you see behind her? (Tree). Yes there are trees. Are they tall? (Yes). And beside her is a _____ (dog). Yes a large dog is standing to her right.* (p. 79)

Similarly, in a developmental view of a literacy class, students are encouraged to use what they know about reading and writing and build on that The role of the teacher again, is not to correct the language, but to respond to the content and to be a real audience for the student. Below is an example of the writing of a beginning writer who

has been encouraged to use what he already knows about writing. The teacher provided scaffolding by showing him how to use blank lines or 'temporary' spelling for words he didn't know how to write. (Completed underlined words were supplied by the teacher.)

Working at the Telephone Company

I will have to fa___ w__ job _____. Wou pp call I hav to make orders for telephones I may hav to go uot for the manager. I may hav to go uot for es_____ ___, I may have to f___a uot papers.

The teacher then asked the student to read the passage to her and the teacher filled in the incomplete words when requested.

Direct instruction has a place in language learning and in literacy, even though its transfer to other contexts is not clear. What seems to be extremely important is that any skills work needs to come from observing students' use of language in order for it to be appropriate to their needs. The conclusion is that while conventional, standard production is a goal, learners need space to develop while they are reaching for that goal.

There is nothing mystical or magical about the processes that go on in literacy or language learning. The trend toward separation and specialization of the two fields is counter-productive in adult education where lines of demarcation are frequently blurred. Rather, we need to talk to each other and share experiences and expertise. We need to learn about our students and how best to address their needs.

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Friday, March 16, 1990
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Teaching Writing Through the Arts

by Nelson Denis

I have been teaching drama and playwriting in the New York City public schools, and at Grosvenor Neighborhood House, for the past three years. During this time, I have developed a set of theatre games and writing exercises which build writing confidence and interest. Some of these derive from Viola Spolin's *Improvisation for the Theatre* and Meredith Sue Willis' *Personal Fiction Writing* (available at Teachers & Writers Collaborative in New York); some of them are my own invention. Most of them are adaptable for ages 10-17. The following is a sequential arrangement of some of these activities:

1) **"Talk" Session**. As a get-acquainted activity on the first day, we all talk about movies, plays, books, and stories we liked, and why. At class end, students write a 5-minute paragraph on their favorite movie/play/book/story and hand it in.

2) **"Oral" Storytelling**. Students read the previous week's 5-minute paragraph to the rest of the class. The class then asks questions about the paragraph and the student revises her work to answer the questions posed by the class.

3) **Monologues**. Students write their own 1-minute monologue. We save the last 20 minutes for student volunteers to read their monologues to the class.

4) **Two-character Plays**. Students pair up and, for the first 20 minutes, they write a 1-minute play for two characters. With the remaining time, students all come up and perform their 1-minute play for the class.

5) **"Free-associative" Plays**. Students break up into groups of 6 or 7, everyone with a pen and paper. Within these groups, students write the first line of a play, then pass the paper to their right. Once the papers have gone around three times, the "play" is complete. Each group then reads their (often very humorous!) play to the whole class.

6) **"Team" Writing** (2-day exercise). On Day #1, we discuss and create a blackboard outline of scenes for a full-length "play." At class end, students write down this outline and "think" about it for next week. On Day #2, the class breaks up into groups, and each group writes one of the scenes. At class end, each group reads their scene of our full-length "play." NOTE: This "team written" play can be the basis for an eventual class performance, or it can be repeated to provide more writing experiences for the class.

7) **"Sound Effects" Writing Exercise.**

Materials: The teacher has prerecorded approximately ten different sound effects in a sequence which the teacher feels might logically occur in imagining a story. Suggestions for sounds are: police sirens, a dog howling, a body falling down the stairs, chains rattling and a baby crying.

Students are asked to imagine a character. The teacher then plays the tape, stopping it after each separate sound effect. Each time a sound effect is played, the student must write something about his character in relation to the sound effect. The exercise continues until the student has written a story which relates each of the successive sounds to the character.

The *overriding* goal in all of these exercises is to *get the students* writing in a free-spirited, non-judgmental setting. Toward this end, improvisation and performance are a part of every exercise, thereby linking the writing experience to the young people's own innate sense of play.

These are some of my basic ingredients. When I throw in a little enthusiasm, and a willingness to be surprised, I *always* discover that there are *many writers out there* with powers of observation, imagination, and extraordinary stories to tell.

Nelson Denis, a lawyer by training, teaches writing to young people at the Grosvenor Neighborhood House, a settlement house on the West Side.

The Information Update is the quarterly newsletter of the Literacy Assistance Center. The Center also publishes a monthly Calendar which provides readers with information on employment opportunities, upcoming events and funding possibilities.

Funding for the newsletter and calendar is provided by the Adult Literacy Initiative of the City of New York, the State Education Department and the Mayor's Office of Educational Services, City of New York.

Subscriptions are free. If interested, please send name and address to:
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